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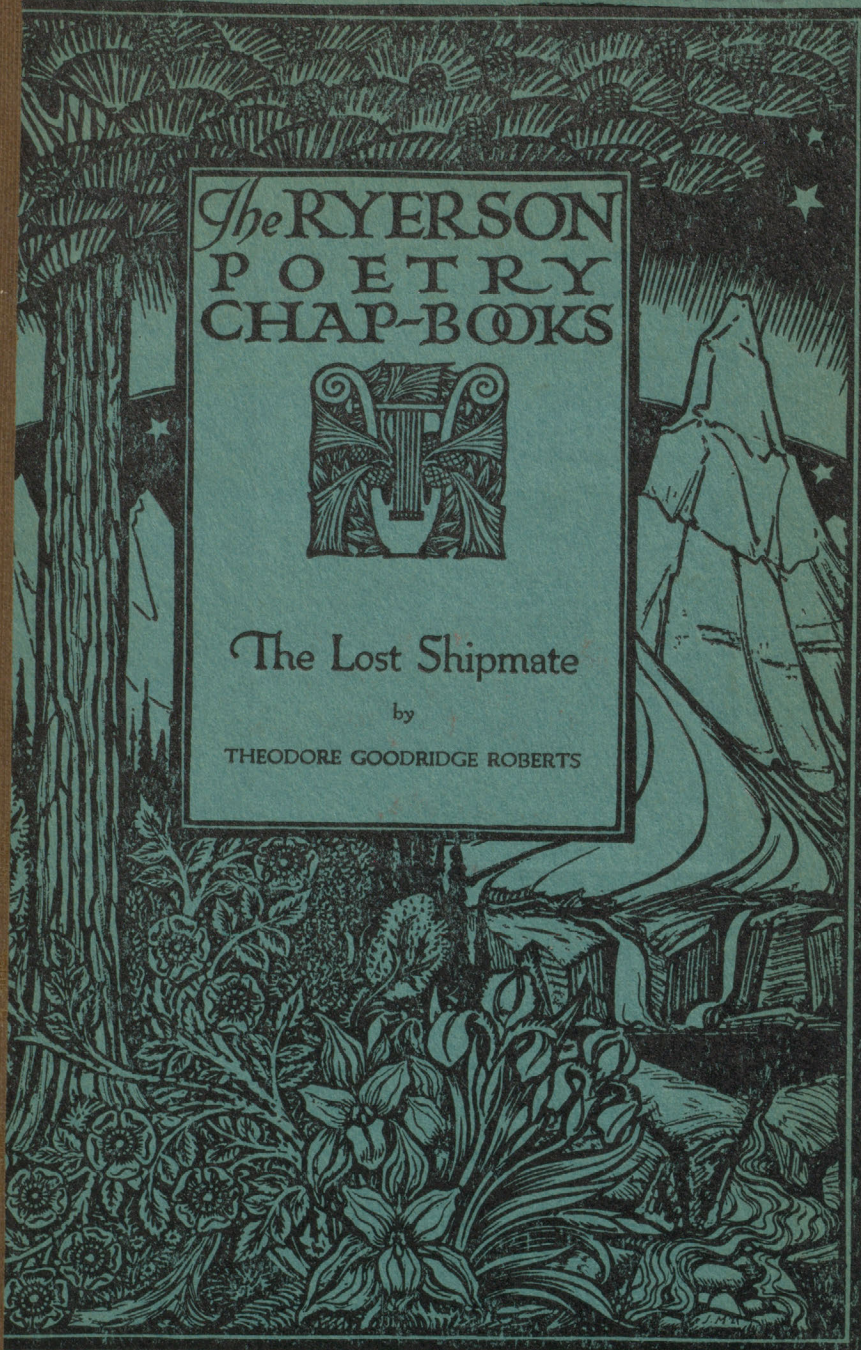
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The Lost Shipmate

by

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

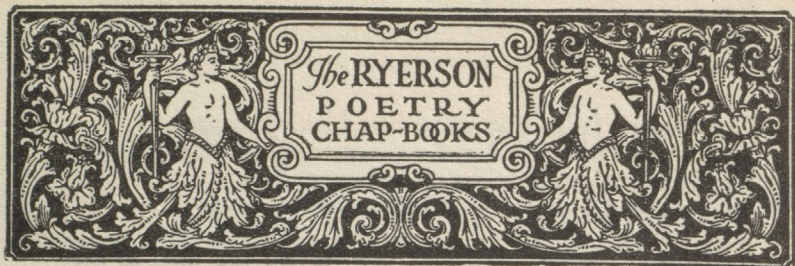


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The Lost Shipmate

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts



THE LOST SHIPMATE

SOMEWHERE he failed me, somewhere he slipt away—
Youth, in his ignorant faith and his bright array.
The tides go out and the flooding tides come in,
And still the old years pass and the new begin—
But Youth?—
Somewhere we lost each other, last year or yesterday.

Somewhere he failed me. . . . Down at the harbor-side
I waited for him a little where the anchored argosies ride.
I thought he came. 'Twas the dawn-wind blowing free!
I thought he came. 'Twas but the shadow of me!
And Youth?—
Somewhere he turned and left me, about the turn of the tide.

Perhaps I shall find him. It may be he waits for me,
Sipping those wines we knew, beside some tropic sea.
The tides still serve, and I am out and away
To search the spicy harbors of yesterday
For Youth,
Where the lamps of the town are yellow behind the lamps of the
quay.

One

Somewhere he left me, some time he turned away—
Youth, of the careless heart and the bright array.
Was it in Bados? God! I would pay to know.
Or was it on Spanish Hill, where the roses blow?
Shall I hear his laughter to-morrow in painted Olivio?

Somewhere I failed him, somewhere I let him depart—
Youth, who could only sleep for the morn's fresh start. . . .
The tides slipt out, the tides washed out and in,
And far and oft were we lured by the capstan's din . . .
Dear Youth,
Shall I find you south of the Gulf?—or are you dead in my
heart?



FIDDLER'S GREEN

"At a place called Fiddler's Green, there do all honest Mariners take their pleasure after death; and there are Admirals with their dear Ladies, and Captains of lost voyages with the Sweethearts of their youth, and tarry-handed Sailormen singing in cottage gardens."

NEVER again shall we beat out to sea
In rain and mist and sleet like bitter tears,
And watch the harbour beacons fade, a-lee,
And people all the sea-room with our fears.
Our toil is done. No more, no more do we
Square the slow yards and stagger on the sea.

No more for us the white and windless day,
Undimmed, unshadowed, where the weed drifts by,
And leaden fish pass, rolling, at their play,
And changeless suns slide up a changeless sky.
Our watch is done; and never more shall we
Whistle the wind across an empty sea.

Cities we saw—white wall and glinting dome—
And palm-fringed islands dreaming on the blue.
To us more fair the kindly sights of home—
The climbing street, the window shining true.
Our voyage is done: And never more shall we
Reef the harsh topsails on a tossing sea.

Wonders we knew and beauty in far ports;
Laughter and peril 'round the swinging deep;
The wrath of God; the pomp of painted courts. . . .
The rocks sprang black!—*And we awoke from sleep.*
Our task is done, and never more shall we
Square the slow yards and stagger on the sea.

Here are the hearts we love, the lips we know,
The hands of seafarers who came before.
The eyes that wept for me a night ago
Are laughing now that we shall part no more.
All grief is done; and never more shall we
Make sail at dawning for the luring sea.



THE DYING PIRATE'S PRAYER

"Fetch aft the rum, Darby!" Captain Flint. (R.L.S.)

OUT FROM the rottin' barnacles and the harbor stench;
Out from the rusty ringbolts adown the weedy stairs;
Out from the roadstead green and the milky inshore blue,
Let me go!—it's all I ask of You!—
Out and away, out and through
To the whisper of bursting bubbles across the deepsea blue.

Let me clear for sea. Let me go aboard
Any old craft that pumps will float clear of soundin's, Lord—
Clear of the festered harbor and through the hole in the reef—
Out on an offshore breeze, clear o' the milky blue,
To the slosh of cloven waters and the lift of the outer blue.
Hear this sinner's prayer, Lord! He'd do the same for you!

I'll take all that's due me in the way of Hell—
But, Lord, to leave me strangle of this here inshore smell!
Me that was bred a seaman, whatever else beside.
Sink me like a seaman, through and down and through
Fathoms o' blue water, down in the deepsea blue,
Out of sight and sound and scent of inshore gear and crew—
Out of sight of every port a seaman ever knew.

There lays the careenage, white as curds in the sun;
White as Devon curds. . . . God, the deeds I've done
Since the day I went a-fishin' and boarded the Sea Rover!

Fetch aft the rum, Darby! Lay aft an' ease me over!

Aye, the damn careenage! Sink it, God of wrath!
Hark'e, God of mercy, to a sick man's prayer!
Let me clear for sea. Any old craft will do.
Drive me out on an offshore breeze to the jumpin' deepsea blue;
Then sink me clear o' soundin's, Lord! I'd do the same for You.

Fetch aft the rum, Darby! . . . Lay aft and raise my head—
And pity a poor seaman bilged ashore in bed
With faces crowdin' 'round—mostly a long time dead.



IN NEPTUNE'S CITY

OFF VINCENT, eighty fathoms deep,
With roofs of coral and pale shell, lies Neptune's city,
Wherein sleep the weary sailors, wherein dwell
The Weavers of the deepsea spell.

Fair sisters, you have lured him far—
But at the last, Death shared the prize!
From guiding light and steadfast star your singing turned his
eager eyes. . . .
Now wake him with your witcheries!

Cradle his head upon that breast, foam-tender and like pearls
agleam.
Perchance he follows some old quest along the windings of his
dream
By ferny track and inland stream?

Perchance this mortal is not made as you are?
Take your harp of shell, all gold-embossed and gem inlaid,
And strike the strings, and break the spell.
Strike the sweet strings. Sing him awake. . . .
Strike the loud strings until they break!

WITH LIFE

DEAR, we must up and out. Life will not wait
Like village beau beside your garden gate.

Dear, the world calls; and Love, who knows the way,
Bids us join hands before the fuller day.

Together, Dear, from morning on to noon,
How gaily Life will pipe his gladdest tune!

Together, Dear, from noon to creeping night,
How kindly Life will lift his surest light!

Dear, we must up and out, and hand in hand
Try the glad vintage of the farthest land.

The world is wide and the bright seas are wide
And isles of magic gleam along the tide

And ancient marvels are forever new
Where the foam-lilies blossom on the blue;

And Life calls to us. Morning-crowned, elate,
He'll bide no longer at your garden gate.



THE LOVER

NEVER had inland garden seemed
So still, so drugged with dew;
Never had green trees sung so sweet
Beneath the empty blue,

"As when he came, so gay, so sad,
And won the heart of me
With those quick moods of his, like shades
Cloud-blown upon the sea.

"Such fairy islands he had seen
Between the blue and grey!
His low-voiced ballads dimmed my eyes,
And lured my heart away.

"He spoke of gale and anchorage;
Of cities far and fair;
Of roses over crumbling walls
Beyond the clanging square.

"He spoke of comradeship; of men
Red-blooded and clear-eyed,
Who feared no risk of war, or chance,
Or continent, or tide.

"He spoke of brave adventurings,
And of those nameless quests
Which lead men down to death, or home
With stars upon their breasts.

"He spoke of love. Ah, tenderly
He told his dreams of love—
Dreams the sea-winds had brought to him
When stars were white above.

* * * * *

"Never has inland garden seemed
So still, so warm, so sweet,
Since he went through the little gate
And down the glaring street.

"What counted all his ringing vows—
So false, so fine, so brave?
I gave him all my heart. Dear God,
What bitterness he gave!"

Below the blue, beneath the weed,
In those strange ways and dim,
Death holds him with a dream of Her—
Doubt brings no pang to him.

QUEEN OF MY YOUTH

SWEET maids and matrons fair,
Pause here in your bright array,
On your joyous way.

Here is a small white stone.
Here is a mound o'ergrown
With grasses seeded and blown.

Under this sod,
Under this grass like rust,
They laid what is now nothing—
Dust to dust!

But what you are
And all that you hope you are
And more than you'll ever be—
Sunshine and shine of star,
Allure of moonrise and sea,
Glamor of Youth and Spring,
Sweet sadness of dawn,
Bitter joyance of music
Played for laughter and kisses—
Were laid here, dreams to dust,
And are gone.

Beauty, longing, desire,
Wonder and tenderness,
Heat and cold, frost and fire—
All these were laid
Here in a green shade
When the race was run
And the game played.

What was her name? I knew it.
Poets rhymed it. Men bled
For a word that she did not say
And a word that was said.
Horses were ridden for her
'Til they staggered and fell.
Wine enough to drown Hell
Was pledged to her.

Her name? Poets rhymed it
And lovers wrote it in blood.
(I was a poet then, with a trick of the word.
I was a lover then, with a trick of the sword.)

Here she rests, Queen of my youth,
All her darts of enchantment hurled—
Dust to dust. And I pledge her again
Toast of the World!



THE MAID

THUNDER of riotous hoofs over the quaking sod;
Clash of reeking squadrons, steel-capped and iron-shod;
The White Maid and the white horse and the flapping banner
of God!

Black hearts riding for hire and red hearts riding for fame;
The maid who rides for France and the king who rides for shame;
Gentlemen, fools and a saint riding in Christ's high name!

"Dust to dust" it is written. . . . Wind-scattered are lance
and bow.

Dust is the Cross of Saint George and dust the banner of snow.
Dust are the bones of the king and dust the shafts of the foe.

Forgotten, the young knight's valour. Forgotten, the captain's
skill.

Forgiven, the fear and the hate and the mailed hands raised to
kill.

Blown dust are the shields that crashed and the arrows that
cried so shrill.

A story from some old book, that battle of Long Ago. . . .
A dream of echoes and ghosts and dust forever a-blow:
Shadows, the poor French King and the might of his English
foe:

Shadows, the charging knights and the archers standing arow:
But a flame in my heart and my eyes, the Maid with the banner
of snow!

LOVE AND THE YOUNG KNIGHT

SAID Love to the young knight, "I am the spur and the prize.

I am the hand of thy 'squire and the light in thy lady's eyes.
I am the force of thy arm, that is more than of sinew and bone.
I am the favour of Arthur smiling down from his throne.

I am the spirit of Christ, high and white as a star.
I am the crown of Mary, outlasting the helmets of war.
I am valour and peace, anger and gentleness.
I am the master of pride and servant of distress."

Said Love to the young knight, "I am the humble task.
I am the high adventure behind the visored mask.
I am the fire of youth that cools not with the years.
I am the lord of passion and comforter of tears."



SONG OF A LOST HEART

BETWEEN the hill and the tide,
The cane-fields and the bay,
I lost my heart, and did not care—
And that was yesterday
In the pink-walled house
Between the hill and the tide
Where all day long the palms shake
And seas ride.

Between the fog and the fire,
Between the kiss and the play,
I lost my heart, and did not grieve—
And that was yesterday
In the grey-walled house
In veiled London town
Where all day long the hopeless shapes
Go up and down.

Between the wood and the shore,
The moss and the river clay,
I lost my heart, and did not fear—
And that was yesterday

In the grey-roofed house
Between the wood and the stream
Where all day long the ancient fir
Whispers his dream.

You of the palms and the tide,
You of the ghost-grey town,
You of the purple wood
Where winds creep up and down,
Find me my heart again
And give it to me once more
And let me lose it again
Between the road and your door—
Between the north and the south—
Between the wood and the tide . . .
My heart has slipped from my side again,
Back to your side.



THE HAMADRYAD

WAS IT the wind I heard starting the leaves athrill?
A wind in the golden birch, when the rest of the wood
was still.
Was it the wing of a bird, high up in that leafy place,
That gleamed so white to my eye, like the mask of a peering
face?

The round moon washed the forest an indescribable blue—
The blue of the unfound rose, the color of dreams come true—
And there in the elfin radiance, deep in the elfin land,
Drunk with the elfin hour, my fingers enclosed her hand.

She led me by the aisles of azure and floating ramparts of sleep
To a castle of hammered silver set in a magic keep.
She led me beyond remembrance of toil and failure and fame,
Back to the glory of youth and the longing that has no name.

Ten

Was it the wind I heard, starting the leaves athrill?
A wind in the golden birch when the rest of the wood was still.
Was it a wing agleam, or her breast, in that leafy place,
When I opened my eyes to the dawn and felt the dew on my face?



SPRING FLIGHT

IS IT the voice of the open waters
Calling the grey geese home from the South?
Do they hear the freshet under the willows
And the grinding logs at the river's mouth?

How do they know the lakes are open?
Do they scent the maple buds bursting red?
Who has whispered them word of April?
Who has told them that Winter's dead?

Strong wings athrill,
Brave hearts astir,
They come, and the stars
Are high and chill,
And the frosty air
Is alive, aware
Of the whisp'ring wings.

Sure, unafraid,
Swift, undismayed,
Where the North Light flings
His cloak, they fly
And *honk* and pass
Under the sky.

My heart flies too
Fearlessly forth
With that feathery crew
To the North.
Up and away—
As their wings aspire—
I sail to the land of my heart's desire.

With scent of alders and swollen waters
And the flooded bar at the river's mouth
Spring, awake in our Nashwaak valley,
Calls her exiles home from the South.



THE DESOLATE CABIN

SWINGS the door at the wind's will,
Grey-yellow the clearings swoon.
Over the stump-land washes
The voiceless afternoon.

Creaks the roof at the wind's whim.
Noiseless the lean hares pass.
Red berries glow on the hummocks.
Shadows crouch in the grass.

Like mist at the rim of the wood
The breath of the forest waits.
Westward, the naked rampikes
Stand at the crimson gates.



RIVER MORNING

MIST along the river creeping down
With spinning clots of drift and blinks of foam.
Terns screaming out along the sandbars.
A heron flapping from his reedy home.

Breath of pennyroyal on the gravel.
Breath of wet willows down the shore.
Start of life around the bushy islands
And, at the East's gold gate, a blue day more.

THE BLUE HERON

IN A green place lanced through
With amber and gold and blue—
A place of water and weeds,
And roses pinker than dawn
And ranks of lush young reeds
And grasses straightly withdrawn
From graven ripples of sands,
The still blue heron stands.

Smoke-blue he is, and grey
As embers of yesterday.
Still he is as death;
Like stone or shadow of stone
Without a pulse or breath;
Motionless and alone
There 'midst the lily-stems—
But his eyes are alive like gems.

Still as a shadow; still
Grey feather and yellow bill;
Still as an image made
Of mist and smoke half hid
By windless sunshine and shade
Save when a yellow lid
Slides and is gone like a breath
Death-still—and sudden as death!



THE LAST BILLET

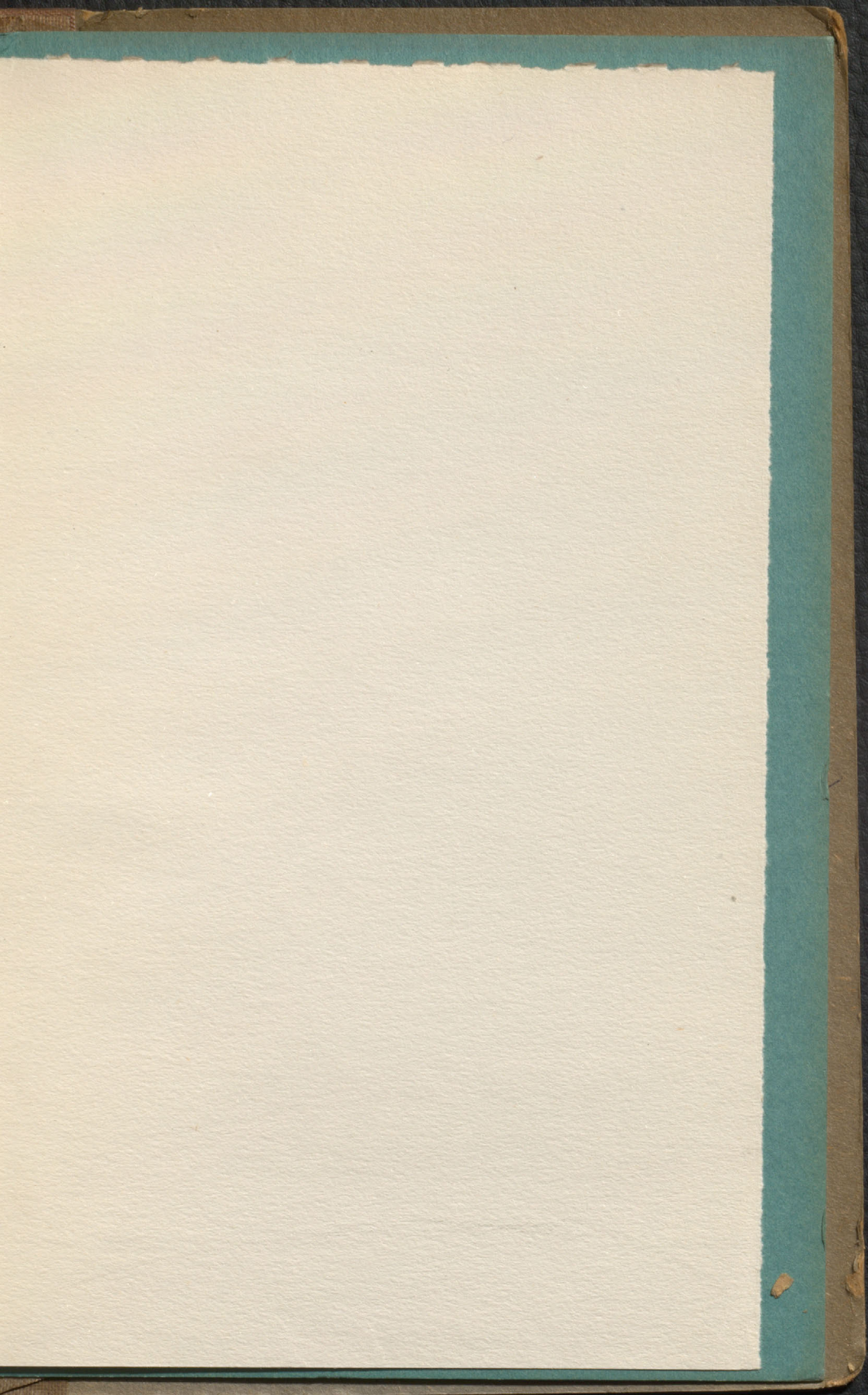
SOME day I'll come to that still place
And bid the old man smooth my bed.
No hurry of departure then.
No waking when the dawn is red.

The same kind trees will sing to me
Day after day, night after night.
The wind that wanders in the grass
Will bring no tidings of the fight.

In that still hostelry of rest,
Where time is not and sleep is long,
I'll clean forget the thing unwon
And pain of the unfinished song.

Night will not find me journeying
Where endless roads in dusk are set
On some fool's errand down the world,
Hag-ridden by an old regret.

Some evening I shall turn aside
To that dark hostelry of rest
And at the threshold loose my spurs
And to the wind bequeath my quest.



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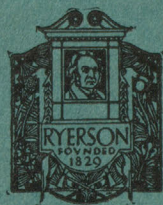
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